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ABSTRACT

School restructuring requires the critical assessment of all aspects of the educational system, including the goals of schooling; organization and management at the local, district, and state levels, curriculum; instruction; roles and responsibilities of educational personnel, students, and parents; school finance; and education regulation and control. However, recognition of the need for restructuring is accompanied by discouragement due to a scarcity of guidelines for implementation. Guidelines developed by a diverse group of New Mexico educators are provided in this educational policy bulletin, with a focus on identification of goals; delineation of roles and authority; and recommended actions at the school, district, and state levels. Eight questions with suggestions for possible courses of action are presented. (LMI)

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INSIGHTS ON EDUCATIONAL POLICY AND PRACTICE

Number 14 October 1989

"Guidelines" for Restructuring the System

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INSIGHTS ON EDUCATIONAL POLICY AND PRACTICE

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"Guidelines" for Restructuring the System

"Restructuring" requires taking a critical look at all aspects of schooling including the mission and goals of schooling; organization and management at the local, district, and state levels; curriculum; instruction; roles and responsibilities of educational personnel, students, and parents; school finance; and education regulation and control. However, while many district and state leaders recognize that it may be desirable to restructure the educational system, they are discouraged by the scarcity of guidelines for implementing such efforts. The following "guidelines" were developed by a diverse group of New Mexico educators. The group formed as a result of a conference, "Organizing for Excellence," sponsored by SEDL during August, 1988. The "guidelines" that follow are presented as a set of questions with suggestions for possible courses of action to consider when restructuring the educational system.

Question 1: How are the goals of the educational system to be determined?

The group suggested using the expertise of members of the educational community (teachers, administrators, other school personnel, parents, community members, and students) when identifying the fundamental beliefs upon which the system will be based and when developing state, district, and school goals.

Question 2: How will successful achievement of each goal be determined? How will successful achievement of the goals be rewarded? How will failure to achieve them be corrected?

As goals are identified, expected outcomes that define their successful achievement should be developed for each. Rewards for success and plans to correct failure also should be developed.

Question 3: What state and district decisions should involve school-site personnel participation ?

In addition to involvement in developing state and district belief, mission, and goal statements, school-site personnel might be included in making decisions about compensation, collective bargaining, budgeting and allocation of resources, accountability processes, and the development of state and district policies.

Question 4: What decisions (and the authority to implement them) should be decentralized to the school-site level in order for members of the school community to carry out the goals that are their responsibility?

The school community should have the authority for making and implementing decisions that enable it to adapt to the needs of the school's students, to have the flexibility to change when needed, to establish a wide leadership base, and to initiate and implement school improvement efforts that can have significant results. Such decisions might involve the development of school mission, goals, and program plans; curriculum implementation; instructional technology; school-site budgeting; evaluation of product and program; determining school rules and procedures; staffing

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needs; and personnel procedures (e.g., procedures for hiring, evaluation, and staff development).

Question 5: What resources should be decentralized to the school level in order to implement the decisions suggested in Question 4?

The group suggested that decentralizing resources -- money and authority -- might be considered in the areas of time, staff, curriculum, and budget. Time is essential for meeting together to gain input from all groups (e.g., school staff, community members, parents, etc.), to discuss and decide, for staff development on participatory management processes, for learning new ways of doing things, for identifying resources, for developing curriculum, for implementing changes, and for evaluating results. Building control over time is essential for developing daily, weekly, and yearly schedules to ensure that student learning is a relevant, continuous experience.

Authority to carry out decisions about staffing and personnel procedures is essential to ensure that school staff members support the schoolwide effort; that evaluation is consistent with the methods, techniques, and content in use; that the school-site has sufficient ability to reward or redirect personnel; and that staffing is appropriate for meeting the needs of the school.

Authority to carry out decisions about curriculum and instruction is essential to ensure that, while accomplishing established state standards, the needs of students in each school are met in ways that will provide opportunities for student success. Decisions about curriculum would include choice of curriculum materials, textbooks, methodology and instructional techniques, and uses of technology.

The ability to carry out budget decisions ensures that resources identified as essential by the school are available to carry out school goals. Each school should be able to identify a set of resources and materials necessary to address its unique goals and priorities. Variations should be expected in the way schools budget for staffing, staff development, curriculum materials, and other resources.

Question 6: What actions should be taken at each level (school, district, state) for the decisions suggested in Question 4 to be made at the school level?

Actions at the School Level. The group suggested that it would be important for administrators and teachers to create a vision, exercise leadership, generate enthusiasm, and gain the commitment of the entire school community. Leadership should provide the environment for staff members to participate in program planning, budget development, and administration. For example, when determining school rules and procedures, students, parents, teachers, administrators, and school board members might be involved in decisions concerning appropriate rewards and punishments and about the choice of personnel who implement discipline rules and procedures.

The group suggested that decision making be shared by the school community. While the school staff might make the final decision, parents and students also should have input into the content of curriculum guides and materials, scheduling classes, and personnel procedures. School staff would make priority decisions and participate in administering the budget. Principal and staff would select a testing program for the individual school and set criteria for mastery/grades.

It was the group's opinion that comprehensive, continuous inservice training should be built into both the calendar and the budget. The entire school staff would determine inservice needs, participate in program planning and budget development, and participate in an ongoing inservice program.

Actions at the District Level. The district would provide flexibility, support, and funding necessary at the school-level for each school to accomplish its own missions, goals, and program plans. The district would ensure that standards are met and would establish board policy conforming to state laws. The district would provide training in evaluation and would coordinate with outside agencies.

The district would encourage everyone in the community to be involved in setting the budget. It would ensure that quality time is provided for staff development and budget planning and that funds are available for in-service. The district would provide training, on request, for school staff. The district would provide information about budget and administrative processes, a budget-development model, a specific funding amount, and a process for schools to decide expenditure priorities. The district would handle issues involving budget overages and shortages.

Actions at the State Level. The state would support all local decisions that are consistent with state laws and that do not abuse or remove civil rights, and would provide districts and schools with the flexibility to accomplish missions, goals, and programs. The state would provide appropriate funding, assist districts in coordination, and provide technical assistance. The state would provide flexibility to districts in staffing and certification practices. It would provide for flexibility in terms of appropriate amount and content of testing and would provide testing *options* instead of *mandates*. The state would provide flexibility for inservice activities that involve the majority of a school's staff; and provide extra funding for a specific period of time for inservice, for substitutes, and for extra days worked by staff.

Question 7: What new roles and/or functions might be expected of personnel at each level in a restructured system?

School-Site

School Administrators -- Need skills to facilitate group decision making, to encourage collaborative activities, to broaden instructional leadership to include teachers, and to share management of resources.

Teachers -- Need to develop decision-making skills, to learn to work collaboratively with colleagues, and to accept responsibility for total school success.

Students -- Need to accept responsibility for their own behavior and to learn to work cooperatively together for the success of schooling.

Parents -- Need to accept responsibility for becoming involved in the schooling effort.

District Level

School Board -- Has the responsibility for defining goals and should provide the support and flexibility schools require to achieve those goals. Must understand the dynamics of decentralizing decision making and managing the outcomes.

Superintendent -- Needs skills to facilitate group decision making, to encourage collaborative activities, and to share management of resources. With the School Board, has the responsibility for defining expected outcomes, and should provide the support and flexibility schools require to achieve those outcomes. Must understand the dynamics of decentralizing and managing a restructured system.

Central Office Staff -- Must adopt support and facilitation roles to respond to the varying needs of the schools. Must be knowledgable about change and group processes and provide technical assistance to schools on request.

State Level

State Legislature -- Should establish guidelines for accountability and provide resources, review past legislation to determine compatibility with participatory

management philosophy, and enact legislation to allow flexibility for all levels to achieve legitimate educational goals.

State Board of Education -- Should establish standards of accountability, review regulations to determine compatibility with participatory management philosophy, and allow flexibility for all levels of the system to achieve legitimate educational goals.

State Education Agency -- Should provide flexibility for districts and schools to achieve legitimate educational goals, monitor compliance with state standards, and offer technical assistance.

Question 8: What actions should be taken to implement the plans formed in answer to the previous questions?

1. State Board of Education and Local Boards must approve participatory management policies to set plans in motion.
2. State Department of Education, local education agencies, administrators, staff, professional organizations, parents, and community members must be aware of and support participatory management processes.
3. Flexibility to achieve legitimate educational goals must be extended to individual schools which demonstrate that a school-based participatory decision making process has been followed.
4. Staff development activities must be provided in order to develop needed skills.

These "guidelines" were developed by the New Mexico/SEDL Partners as a means for clarifying the process of changing roles, relationships, authority patterns, and resource allocation within states, districts, and schools. The success of any restructuring effort will depend on the degree of change in the system as a whole. The goal of such change should be to enable schools to better meet the learning needs of students.

These Guidelines were developed by the following team of New Mexico/SEDL "Organizing for Excellence" Partners.

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